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ENG 3010G-001: Literary masterworks

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English 3010G-001 Literary Masterworks
TTh: 11-12:15 Coleman Hall 3150
Spring semester 2005
Dr. Susan Bazargan
Office Hours: T and Th: 12:30-2; T 3:15-4:15 and by appointment
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This course will introduce you to some of the best fiction produced by British and North American authors of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. We'll mainly focus on the "*bildungsroman*," the novel of formation or education. You'll read and write about issues of identity formation, rites of passage, and the anxieties and problems faced by young people entering adulthood. We'll discuss why this type of novel still remains a favorite genre in fiction and what purposes it serves.

Course requirements:

Attendance:

Class attendance and participation are expected. I call roll regularly and can disregard only two unexcused absences during the semester. If you accumulate more than two unexcused absences, your grade for the semester will suffer (1/2 point for each absence). If you're absent because of an illness, I will expect a note from your doctor or the health center. In case of a family emergency, please stop by the first chance you have so we can talk about classes you've missed.

Papers:

You'll write two 4-page papers. If you wish, you can incorporate research material in them (some of the topics require that you do so). Use the MLA style of documentation in case you decide to write a research paper. If you wish, you can revise one of your papers for a better grade. Your final grade on the paper will be the average of the two grades. This is a writing-intensive course, so you can use one of the papers (preferably the revised one) for your writing portfolio. Late papers will be marked down (unless you have an excused absence for the day). Very late papers (turned in a week after the deadline) will not be accepted.

Revision:

Cosmetic changes to your paper will not result in a better grade. Besides editing your paper to fix basic problems (with grammar, spelling, punctuation, word choice, etc.), you need to incorporate new material in the paper. The revision has to show you've reworked some of the paragraphs to add more substance to your argument, to further clarify some of the ideas and/or reorganize them, and to offer a better introduction or conclusion. The result has to be a stronger, more cogent paper.

Journal:

You need to write in your journals at least twice a week, each time after you've completed the assigned reading for the upcoming class meeting. I'll expect to see at least 25 entries by the end of the semester. Please date each entry—which can be one page to several pages long. In your journal, write down your thoughts, responses, and, especially *questions* you have regarding the assigned readings. Bring your journals to class. I might ask you to share your questions and insights with the class. I'll ask to see your journals twice during the semester.

Exams and quizzes:

You'll take midterm and final exams. They will consist of a number of questions (10-15) to which you'll be asked to provide paragraph-long answers. I might give you pop quizzes, especially if I get the feeling you're not keeping up with the reading.

Grading Policy:

Papers: 30%; Exams (and quizzes, if any are given): 40%; Journal: 15%; Participation: 15%

Conferences: Please stop by my office to discuss any problem or question related to the course. You can make an appointment if my regular office hours are inconvenient for you. The best way to reach me is by e-mail.

Other policies:

Almost all of the novels we're reading have been the subject of a great deal of critical writing. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with what other readers have said and thought about these books; you can draw upon other readers' ideas, as long as you give them credit! But if the dark forces ever tempt you to plagiarize, please remember that I'm very good at detecting plagiarism; if you're discovered, I'll be required to give you a grade of F for the course and report you to the Judicial Affairs Office! (This is the English Department policy.) If you're nervous about your writing skills, let me know, and I'll be happy to work with you on an individual basis. Remember that the Writing Center is a great resource for you to use.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Required Texts:

Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*

Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!*

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus*

Class meetings:

January 11: Introduction to the course

1/13: *Great Expectations*, Chaps. 1- 10

1/18: *GE*, Chaps. 11-20

1/20: *GE*, Chaps. 21-31

1/25: *GE*, Chaps. 32- 44

1/27: *GE*, Chaps. 45-end

February 1: *Jane Eyre*, Chaps. 1-10

2/3: *JE*, Chaps. 11-17

2/8: *JE*, Chaps. 18-28

2/10: *JE*, Chaps. 29-end

2/15: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

2/17: *WSS*

2/22: *WSS*

FIRST PAPER IS DUE

2/24: *WSS*

March 1: Midterm exam

3/3: *Frederick Douglass*, Chaps. 1-5

3/8: *FD*, Chaps. 6-end

Turn in your journals

3/10: *O Pioneers!* Part I and half of Part II

Spring Break

3/22: *OP*, rest of Part II and Part III

3/24: *OP*, Part IV and V

3/29: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Chaps. 1 and 2)

3/31: *AP*, Chaps 3 and 4

April 5: *AP*, Chap. 5

4/7: *Maus* (first half)

4/12: *Maus* (second half)

4/14: *Life of Pi*

Turn in your Journals.

4/19: *Life of Pi*

SECOND PAPER IS DUE.

4/21: *LP*

4/26: *LP*

4/28: *LP*

ALL REVISED PAPERS ARE DUE.

English 3010G

Dr. Susan Bazargan

Paper topics for Literary Masterworks:

(Note: If you're interested in doing research, choose one of the first four topics. You can **modify** a topic; if you wish to do so, **check with me first.**)

1. Focusing on the time period of the novel (for example, the first 20-30 years of the nineteenth century in England in the case of *Great Expectations*), study one of the social problems of that era which is of great interest to the author. (For example, Dickens is clearly interested in issues related to crime and/or punishment.) In your essay, first, describe the problem in its historical context; if it is a rather complex issue (such as crime), you need to confine it to one of its dimensions or kinds. This informative part of the paper should be followed by your exploration of the **ways** in which your chosen author highlights this issue in his/her novel (through narrative technique, descriptive language, characterization, symbols and images, etc.). How does the author elicit the reader's "appropriate" intellectual and emotional response?
2. In his narrative, Frederick Douglass occasionally refers to other writers and/or prominent figures he found inspirational in his quest for freedom. For example, he refers to John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), the American poet and abolitionist. First, research the life and work of this writer or activist to see why he (or she) was important to Douglass. In your paper, offer some information about this person's work and its relevance to and significance in Douglass's *Narrative*.
3. Read a number of critical/scholarly essays on the novel of your choice. From among these articles, choose two you found most useful. In your essay, explain what the writers have to say about the novel, how their views differ from one another, and to what extent you agree or disagree with their interpretations (and why you found them interesting or enlightening).
4. Suppose you were to choose and teach one of the novels on the syllabus (presumably to high school or advanced junior high students). Research the ways in which others have taught this novel, and then explain how you would teach it—the kinds of strategies you'd use, what you'd emphasize in your teaching, and why.
5. The novels we're reading all fall in the category of the "*bildungsroman*," literally a "novel of formation or education" of a young person. But what does one mean by "education"? In your paper, try to come up with a good enough definition of the term that would be applicable to your exploration of one main character's "education" in your chosen novel. (You can start with a good dictionary. Check the etymology of the word.) Using your definition (s?), trace your character's development and formation into an "educated" person.
6. Write an essay in which you focus on a few key moments or incidents that mark

your chosen character's "awakening"—his/her realization of who he/she is in the larger scheme of things. First, examine the process the character goes through to achieve self-realization. Second, take a further step and study how the character responds to this experience later in his/her life. The idea is for you to consider what we mean by change and growth in the course of life.

7. Most of us take our socio-economic backgrounds and the opportunities they offer for granted. The forces that make or shape us remain invisible. But novels teach us otherwise—at least some do. Examine one of the novels we've read that best calls your attention to the fact that there is no "natural" identity—that its formation is heavily dependent on historical, social, and economic forces. Explore **how** the author manages to increase our awareness of these often invisible components.
8. Travel appears as a major theme in some of the novels we've read. Choose one of the novels and examine the importance of this theme in the character's emotional and psychological/spiritual growth and development. (You might want to begin by thinking about "travel" itself.)
9. One of our novels (*Maus*) is a graphic one. Explore how reading this novel is like and unlike reading a conventional narrative. Examine both the advantages and disadvantages of the form. Does the "lightness" of the format interfere with the seriousness of the subject matter of *Maus*? (Is it even fair to call the format "light"?) How does the art complement the text? (You can think of other key questions in your appraisal.)
10. Having read *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, you are in the position to describe the relationship between these two novels. Did reading the latter change your response to or understanding of the former? In what ways? How do the two main female characters of the two books compare?
11. The themes of oppression and abuse appear in a number of the novels. Which one portrays the themes most effectively for you? **How** does the author make the character's experience come alive for you? What is the author trying to reveal about the nature of such cruel practices as the kind of abuse Pip, Jane, and Frederick have to tolerate?